

# CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the New York Theatre Scene

## New York Theatre Diary

Anna Russell's Little Show- Vanderbilt 9/7/53. Eastman Boomer and Arthur Klein present the British "concert comedienne" in a revue with Jean Leon Destine, Paul Duke, Paul Berlin and Ted Sadlowski...Carnival in Flanders- Century 9/8/53. Paula Stone and Michael Sloane present a musical based on French film classic. Music by James van Heusen, lyrics by Johnny Burke, book by George Oppenheimer and Herbert Fields; Stars Dolores Gray and John Raitt...The World of Sholem Aleichem- Barbizon Plaza- 9/11/53. Howard da Silva and Arnold Perl present Arnold Perl's dramatization of 3 short stories. Cast includes Morris Carnovsky, Ruby Dee, Jack Gilford and Da Silva. Limited run of 7 weeks. show ran for 3 weeks at same theatre in May.

## Current Theatre Reviews

Oklahoma-City Center 8/31/53. It's still a hit! Third time round and 11 years later the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical still wins 100% approval from the NY daily drama critics. Lyrics and book by Hammerstein still remain gay and undated, while Rodgers music is generally agreed to be his best. Cast for the limited 5 week run was applauded by all, while Kerr, Herald Tribune, labeled Florence Henderson's "Laurey" as the most perfect he ever expects to see. All departments shared in the praise, especially the bright new sets by Lemuel Ayers and the costumes by Miles White. Sole negative comment was filed by Atkinson, Times, who noted that the current performance lacks the crackle and breezy assurance of the finest. Kerr and Atkinson both voiced the opinion that the first act ballet was slightly on the sloppy side. Chapman, News, simply listed the show as the sunniest and happiest musical play of our time that has retained the human qualities which make it a lovable and wonderful show. Watts, Post, and McClain, Journal American, were surprised to find songs in show that they had completely forgotten about. The latter believes there is scarcely a man now alive who has not memorized the score or become related by marriage to some member of some cast. Ridge Bond, Alfred Cibelli and Mary Marlo were highlighted, along with Henderson, by most of the daily critics.

## Strawhat Tryouts

Kismet, the musical version of Edward Knoblock's play, will with the proper pruning of the book be a sure fire Broadway winner, predicts Zito, Billboard. Alfred Drake and Doretta Morrow head fine cast, Jack Cole's dance creations result in some show stoppers, while the music based on Alexander Borodin's work reveal certain hits...With Drums and Colors, Romeo Muller's first play about the theatre rebirth of an aged trouper, produced at Virginia Beach, Va. Theatre Go Round is a thoughtful play with moments of charm, reports Variety mugg. But in its lesser moments it is embarrassing and somewhat disconnected.

## Hits Revisited

Bazel Flagg, despite the heat, seems brighter, breezier and better than when it first made its bow on Broadway, raves Coleman, Mirror. Musical responded after 8 week summer vacation. Sole cast change was Tony Bavaar assuming the role created by John Howard. Critic notes that Bavaar has an excellent voice, good looks and an ingratiating way with a romantic role...Picnic remains the best new play now on Broadway, praises Atkinson, Times. It is original, honest, moving and forceful, while the performance is still a superb piece of work by all concerned.

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' Village Theatre '  
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The Heiress opens at the Green Room Studio, 145 Bleecker St, the Village's newest showshop for a 3 week end run. The converted store turned into a theatre is owned by Henry Calvert and Mary Calvert.

Art and Drama Club, under the direction of Will Anthony Madden and Betty Linneballe, opens its new season Sept 26 at 469 8th Ave, Short sketches featuring Madden will be presented. Admission is by reservation only, the club seats 40.

Circle in the Square has decided to produce a new work when The Grass Harp closes at the end of September...Originals Only is casting for its next production Tensions, a group of 1 act plays by Robert Hanlon.

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' Off Broadway '  
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Blackfriars will start the new season with Late Arrival, a new play by Charles Oxton. This will mark the start of the group's 13th season...Comic Opera Guild will present Patience at McBurney Theatre, 215 W 23, Sept 25, 27, Oct 2, 4.

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' Vaudeville '  
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Palace new bill features Keaton & Armfield, Joe Jackson, Jr. Park & Clifford, Eva Walker, Maurice & Maryea, Patti Parks, Simpson's Humanettes and John & Claire St. Claire.

Spanish vaudeville show at Brooklyn Strand features Argentine movie star Libertad Lamarque. House's first show with Mexican film stars Gloria Marin and Abel Salazar featured was okayed by Cohen, Variety, though he doesn't understand language.

"Confetti", current Music Hall revue, received luke warm trade journal notices. Gen. Variety, noted show as sub-standard, while Smith, Billboard, reported less than the usual amount of spectacle.

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' Theatre Record Comments '  
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"Selections from Can-Can and Me and Juliet" (MGM) by Ted Straeter's orchestra rated 64 from Billboard's staff or reviewers. Wonderful style of Straeter with the vocalists, headed by Sue Bennett was applauded.

"An Evening With William Shakespeare" (Theatre Masterworks) is recommended by "R.P." Times. The 2 disc set is based on the Dec 5, 1952 program presented in Hartford, Conn, to raise money for the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre. It has Margaret Webster as narrator, with Eva Le Gallienne, Staats Cotsworth, Arnold Moss, Faye Emerson, Wesley Addy, Nina Foch and Claude Rains. Richard Dyer Bennet sings Elizabethan songs.

"Golden Age of the Theatre" (Audio Rarities) featuring the voice of Edwin Booth, Ellen Terry, Joseph Jefferson and others is interesting from the historical viewpoint only, comments "R.P." Times. Many of the voices preserved are hardly audible. Mary Jo Devlin narrates the words of each speech before the actual voice of the actor is heard.

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' Green Room Department '  
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ANGEL ANGLES...Producers as a whole have no conception of the extent and intensity of investor suspicion and resentment against alleged( justifiable or not) financial and operating abuses and lapses of Broadway managements, sums up Variety. Trade paper's recent article "Revolt of the Angels" has brought diverse reactions. Producers tab it "regrettable journalism", while most investors who have either written or phoned find the story very accurate.

R & H PRO & CON...Foes of Rodgers and Hammerstein should at least agree among themselves before they wage war on the majority, suggests Watts, Post. One group denounces R & H for cheapening and popularizing the musical play. While another group feels with equal bitterness that R & H are making it too stuffy and high-brow. Either way the critic thinks they are wrong. The team's important contribution to the US musical play has been that they have given it a brilliant amalgamation of frank popular appeal and intelligent imagination...NYC might as well have called the 1943-1953 period the Rodgers & Hammerstein decade, points out Kerr, Herald Tribune...While Chapman, News, would rather have a Rodgers & Hammerstein week yearly.

TUCKER JUBILEE...It is befitting for the legion of friends and admirers of Sophie Tucker that they should honor her at a Golden Jubilee Testimonial Dinner at the Waldorf Astoria, Oct 4, applauds a Times editorial. To such a versatile and generous trouper the editorial says thanks for the half century of songs, some sad, some comic, but always entertaining.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...If Henry Sherek really wants to bring T.S. Eliot's The Confidential Clerk to NY, his billing of the play as the 1st victim of the new Equity foreign actor ruling will not endear himself to Equity, notes McCord, Herald Tribune...More theatre stars should have the same courage as Melvyn Douglas, Time Out for Ginger, in keeping faith with their fans by touring, urges Coleman, Mirror.

COLUMN TIPS...Perhaps the most useful and/or interesting tip printed in years is filed by Mortimer Mirror, who advises the Wish You Were Here chorus girls that the wise guys can look into their dressing rooms from 45th St. hotels..Mary Martin and Ethel Merman turned down \$100,000 to repeat their Ford Anniversary duet on the Arthur Murray TV show, reports O'Brian, Journal American..Margaret Truman is being sought by Josh Logan for a musical with Ezio Pinza, hears Sobol, Journal American.

ACTORS AIDS...The first duty of any theatrical worker, actors included, is to create artistic satisfaction not for himself, but for his audience, reminds Burr, Playbill...The emotional excitement of a premiere is good for the performer and he is likely to give his best portrayal when subjected to the stimulation of opening night opera, Watts, Post, believes in correcting a popular misconception.

Pros & Cons by TMK

Those who condemn Rodgers & Hammerstein for being responsible for 25% of NYC's current shows are placing the blame on the wrong people. The town's other producers should be blamed for not producing good enough musicals. Another aspect of

R & H success is the long term employment they provide those good enough to get into their cast. Equity, not the city, should have given R & H an award for this a long time ago.

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NYC Theatre News Round Up  
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"Interim Booking" is a new Broadway term plaguing theatre producers this season. Under "normal" booking conditions, a theatre manager can expel a show from his house when a given production's weekly gross falls below a given "stop clause." Thus if a production continues to earn money, the manager has no way and would not want to, get the show out of his house. But this year's hectic theatre booking jam is far from "normal." Already 8 houses have "interim bookings." The latest to sign for such a precarious arrangement are the producers of Late Love, Rosemary Casey's new comedy which will open at the National October 11. Hit or flop, the show must vacate by November 11 when the theatre will house the Playwrights Company production of Sabrina Fair, the Samuel Taylor play co-starring Margaret Sullavan and Joseph Cotton.

#### Plays

Ethel Waters and Victor Borge solo presentations both booked houses this week. At Home With Ethel Waters, in which the star will present 22 numbers from her past successes, will open for a limited 6 week run at the 43rd St. Theatre. While Borge's Concert in Comedy one man show will open at the Golden October 2. Borge is currently in the midst of a 16 day engagement at the annual Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, playing to audiences up to 25,000 daily... Porgy and Bess will commence another nationwide tour Oct 10 after it closes at the Ziegfeld... A Night in Venice, Mike Todd's outdoor spectacle will play for 12 weeks at San Paulo, Brazil, starting Jan 1.

#### People

Jack Raines has been signed by Bill Doll to play Dr. Watson in Sherlock Holmes. The Australian actor is currently seen in the films "Julius Caesar" and "The Happy Time"... Mrs. Lorraine Manville, sister of Tommy Manville, is one of the major backers of A Night in Venice. This fact was brought out in a lawsuit by a lawyer against Jones Beach Productions, Inc. Mrs. Manville put up \$150,000 toward the 1st year's production of the outdoor show.

#### Theatre Film Notes

Judy Holliday has been signed by Columbia Pictures for the role of Eileen in "Wonderful Town". Marge and Gower Champion have also been signed to appear as the football player and his wife... John Brasica, who was the featured dancer in the Broadway musical Hazel Flagg, will be featured in Paramount's tribute to Irving Berlin, entitled "White Christmas".... "The Loves of Shakespeare" is the title of a planned film to be written and produced by Claude Binyon and Dimitri Tiomkin.

#### Theatre TV & Radio Notes

"Stage Struck", CBS Radio weekly hour long program produced in cooperation with the League of NY Theatres, will debut Friday, Oct 2 at 8 30 PM EST. Mike Wallace will serve as reporter for the taped series. The first program will include backstage interviews at Can-Can, plus chats with Rosalind Russell, Basil Rathbone, Edna Wallace Hopper and Shirley Booth.

#### Theatre Obit

Darrell Fancourt, the leading player of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, died at his home in London at the age of 65. The famed Gilbert and Sullivan favorite, who played leading roles in the company for 30 years, had announced his retirement this year. He recently received the Order of the British Empire at the Coronation.

